



Vermont Child Protection Advisory Board 2003

At its first meeting on September 30, 1999, board members decided that the board's success will be measured by answering the following questions:

- ◆ Does Board feel informed and understand the Department in the broad sense?
- ◆ Does the Department get leadership from the Board and feel that it is a good use of time?
- ◆ Has Board reviewed child fatalities or near fatalities and/or other issues referred?
- ◆ Has Board examined the strengths and weaknesses of the SRS system and made recommendations for improvement?
- ◆ Has Board evaluated data around trends/issues and discussed implications for future planning?
- ◆ Has Board offered useful and significant recommendations to the department?
- ◆ Has Board produced annual report?

Background

For a number of years the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) has strived to increase consumer and citizen involvement in the department's activities. In 1999, consistent with the provisions of the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), SRS formed Child Protection Advisory Board. The Board meets quarterly to discuss a broad variety of issues related to child protection in Vermont.

Members

Joseph Hagan, M. D., co-chair, pediatrician

Kathleen Moroz, D.S.W., co-chair, University of Vermont Department of Social Work

Rev. Stephen Berry, Foster and Adoptive Parent

Charles Biss, Director of Children's Services, Vermont Department of Developmental and Mental Health Services

Richard Bingham, Partners in Service program

Hon. George Belcher, Judge, Washington Probate Court

Jim Bulger, Vermont Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

Anne-Marie Caron, Baird Center for Children and Families

Hilda Green, Community-Based Resource Programs, AHS Planning

Stacey Heuer, Parent

Linda Johnson, Prevent Child Abuse Vermont

Lisa Keller, Director, Brattleboro SRS

Peter Lee, Office on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs

Michael McAdoo, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs

Dawn Philibert Vermont Department of Health

Alice Siegriest, Vermont Children's Aid Society

Amy Torchia, Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Maj. Robert White, Criminal Division, Vermont Dept. of Public Safety

SRS Staff: James Morse, Commissioner; Les Birnbaum, General Counsel; Don Mandelkorn, Director of Social Services; Cindy Walcott, Policy and Planning Chief



FY 2003 Board Meetings

Vermont's Citizen Advisory Board met four times in FY 2003, on 9/4/02, 12/4/02, 3/5/03 and 6/4/03. The following issues, among others, were discussed.

- Response of Roman Catholic Diocese to National Child Abuse "Scandal" — During the year, SRS worked closely with the Bishop Angell and the Roman Catholic Diocese to discuss the most appropriate way to respond to allegations of child abuse by clergy. The board was kept up to date about this process and proposed legislation adding clergy as mandated reporters.

ACTION: The Board passed the following motion:

- ◆ *That clergy subject to child abuse investigations receive the standard substantiation or unsubstantiation letter that any person would receive, to avoid discrimination.*

- SRS Budget in the Context of State Budget Pressures — SRS experienced both budget and position cuts this year. The Board discussed the impact of budget and position cuts, including expected reduction of revenues as a result of a federal IV-E audit

ACTION: The Board resolved to inform congressional delegates of the impact of IV-E reductions.

- SRS Budget Priorities – Commissioner Young presented the department's priorities for preserving services when budget cuts are necessary, and asked for the Board's input on those priorities.

ACTION: The Board passed the following motion:

- ◆ *In the face of expected budget cuts, the Board supports agency prioritization of (1) Protecting kids; (2) Service to kids in custody; and (3) Child Care.*

- Review of SRS Quality Assurance Proposal – In December, the Board heard a presentation about the department's proposed Quality Assurance System. The system will address both internal quality issues, and quality issues for contracted services. Also, the board reviewed the department's Outcomes Reports.





- Review of SRS Structured Decision-making Tools – In April 2003, SRS implemented a set of structured tools to increase consistency of decision-making in the area of child abuse investigations. The Board received information about the tools as they were being developed.
- Review of SRS policy on Child Sexual Abuse – The department asked for the Board’s assistance in reviewing criteria for accepting, investigating and substantiating child sexual abuse, noting that unlike most other states, SRS investigation alleged sexual abuse by non-caretakers. The discussion focused particularly on child-to-child sexual abuse and sexual relationship of teens with other teens and younger adults (which may be “statutory rape” under Vermont statute.) After considerable discussion, the Board concluded:
 - ◆ Department policy on substantiation of sexual abuse is adequate as written.
 - ◆ Several Board members would like to see the department play a greater role in preventing in sexual abuse, and in helping families whose children are engaging in sexual behaviors that may not be abuse, but may lead to abuse in the future.
- Review of Board Function and Priorities – At the March and June meetings, members discussed both membership and how effectively the Board is accomplishing its original purpose. The Board used the questions on Page 1 of this report as a guide to evaluate Board functioning, making conclusions as follows:
 - ◆ The Board is informed about the department in the broad sense.
 - ◆ The Board has provided the department with meaningful input on policy and other issues.
 - ◆ The Board has reviewed child fatalities.
 - ◆ The Board will devote time in Fall and Winter 2003 to evaluating strengths and weaknesses of Vermont’s child protection system.
 - ◆ The Board has reviewed data on a regular basis. The Board will focus more time on discussing implications of trends.
 - ◆ The department feels that the Board has offered significant recommendations.
 - ◆ The Board is producing this annual report.